

MORAY COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 29 January 2020

Council Chambers, Council Office, High Street, Elgin, IV30 1BX

PRESENT

Councillor James Allan, Councillor Theresa Coull, Councillor John Cowe, Councillor Lorna Creswell, Councillor Tim Eagle, Councillor Ryan Edwards, Councillor Claire Feaver, Councillor Donald Gatt, Councillor Marc Macrae, Councillor Derek Ross, Councillor Amy Taylor

APOLOGIES

Councillor Frank Brown, Councillor Aaron McLean

IN ATTENDANCE

The Chief Executive; the Chief Financial Officer; the Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance; the Head of HR, ICT and Organisational Development; the Audit Manager; Ms Maggie Bruce, Audit Scotland and Mrs Caroline Howie as Clerk to the meeting.

Also Present

Councillor Graham Leadbitter (ex-officio)

1 Chair of Meeting

The meeting was Chaired by Councillor Gatt.

2 Declaration of Group Decisions and Members Interests *

In terms of Standing Order 20 and the Councillors' Code of Conduct, there were no declarations from Group Leaders or Spokespersons in regard to any prior decisions taken on how Members will vote on any item on the agenda or any other declarations of Member's interests in respect of any item on the agenda.

3 Minute of meeting dated 13 November 2019

The Minute of the meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee dated 13 November 2019 was submitted and approved.

4 Written Questions

The Committee noted that no written questions had been submitted.

5 Accounts Commission Paper - Safeguarding Public Money: Are You Getting It Right?

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) provided Committee with the third in a series of four reports considering the issues raised in a recent Accounts Commission publication relating to the roles of councillors and officers in safeguarding public money.

Discussions took place on Continuing Personal Development (CPD) for Councillors, on how CPD records are maintained, and on proposals for further support for Councillors in this area.

Councillor Eagle sought clarification on the recent review of the staff structure and if this would require further review in respect of the role of Chief Education Officer.

In response the Chief Executive advised that the role had been taken into account during the recent management review. He further advised the Corporate Management Team would continue to monitor the structure on an ongoing basis.

Thereafter the Committee agreed to note the:

- i. consideration of a further two aspects of the Accounts Commission report on 'How councils work' entitled 'Safeguarding public money: are you getting it right?; and
- ii. comments made in relation to the two checklists covering 'Councillors' Continuing Personal Development' and 'the roles of Statutory Officers including the Chief Education Officer'.

Councillor Leadbitter entered the meeting during discussion of this item.

6 Accounts Commission Report - Local Government in Scotland - Financial Overview 2018/19

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance) provided Committee with information published by the Accounts Commission in its report entitled 'Local Government in Scotland - Financial Overview 2018/19'.

Discussion took place on the challenges to the Council when there is uncertainty around the amount of funding that will be made available to councils when the financial settlement is announced in the forthcoming budget.

Ring-fencing of funds for specific Scottish Government initiatives and funding for health and social care were highlighted as particular issues.

Councillor Leadbitter noted the demands placed on the health service as a consequence of the ageing population and referred to the complex landscape and financial challenges facing the public sector both now and likely to do so in future years.

Thereafter the Committee agreed to note Audit Scotland's Financial Overview report for 2018/19.

7 Audit Scotland Briefing Paper - Preparing for Withdrawal from the European Union

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) provided Committee with information provided by Audit Scotland in a briefing paper entitled 'Preparing for Withdrawal from the European Union'.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to note that:

- i. Audit Scotland has concluded that, across the public sector, preparations for withdrawal from the European Union have been reasonable and proportionate given the level of uncertainty; and
- ii. although the 'no deal' scenario planned for has been avoided for now, uncertainty will remain as the departure date passes and changed arrangements are negotiated. The Council will continue to work with Scottish Government and partners to ensure the impact of any changes are mitigated where these are within the control of the Council.

8 Work of the Internal Audit Section in the Period from 1 October 2019 to 31 December 2019

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) advised Committee on the work of the Internal Audit Section for the period from 1 October 2019 to 31 December 2019.

Councillor Feaver sought clarification on whether an update would be provided on whether the improvements had been investigated and implemented in respect of Licensing fees.

In response the Audit Manager advised any items not progressed within timescales would be reported to Committee.

Councillor Feaver also sought clarification on what recommendations were made following the audit of garden waste permits, what the costs were and if reconciliation was possible.

The Audit Manager referred to the recommendations provided in appendix 1 to the report, and noted that the costs of the service in the first year were still being finalised. He further advised the Council undertook to implement garden waste permits over a short period of time and opted not to number these. In terms of reconciliation the number of permits produced, the number sold and the number remaining is known, however a full reconciliation wasn't possible. He advised he was of the opinion an appropriate level of control was in place.

Following further discussion the Committee agreed to note the report.

9 Local Government Benchmarking Framework 2017/18 Results

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) presented the Committee with benchmarking

performance data for the period 2017/18 following publication of national results and a national report.

Councillor Eagle stated this was the third time he had seen the report and was concerned that some areas were not performing in a way he would have hoped. He sought clarification on what areas the Corporate Management Team (CMT) had identified that were not a priority and were therefore willing to let slip and which ones had CMT identified as priorities.

In response the Head of Strategy, Governance and Performance advised it was Councillors, and not officers, who identified priorities through the Corporate Plan. This would then direct officers to the areas to prioritise and therefore those areas not prioritised would be likely to see a dip in performance.

Councillor Eagle stated it was for Councillors to establish the priorities and for officers to look at targets in the report to identify which ones fit within the priorities identified. He sought clarification on how the report could be made more useful to show how the areas being targeted could be identified to allow specific monitoring. It would then be possible to seek information from officers on the non-prioritised areas to allow consideration of performance and if it was slipping, how far it would be allowed to slip.

In response the Chief Executive advised the role of officers was recognised and the purpose of the report was to allow Committee to identify areas where they may want further scrutiny.

The Head of Strategy, Governance and Performance advised reporting to Service Committees is under review and in future this will have a focus on strategic priorities.

During further discussion the role of Service Committees was discussed and it was advised the structure of Committees would be under consideration at the forthcoming Council meeting on 12 February, where it was hoped more clarity would be provided.

Thereafter the Committee agreed to note the Council's performance in terms of informing potential future agenda items.

Councillor Cowe entered the meeting during discussion of this item.

10 Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) Recommendations Report

A report by the Chief Executive asked Committee to consider the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) Recommendations Report to demonstrate that SPSO recommendations are considered at a senior level.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to approve the report.

11 Statement of Outstanding Business at January 2020

A report by the Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance asked Committee to consider progress and timescales in relation to follow-up reports and actions requested by the Committee at previous meetings.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to note progress and timescales in relation to follow-up reports requested by the Committee.

12 Question Time

There were no questions raised.